

THE FERTILITY OF AMERICAN WOMEN IN 2002

Hospitals, care providers, insurance companies, and baby food manufacturers are among the many groups interested in the number of newborns. The U.S. Census Bureau uses information on changing childbearing patterns to help project the number of people who will be living in the United States in the future.

In the early 1900s, women averaged about four children during their childbearing years, while those living during the Great Depression averaged about two. After World War II, the total fertility rate for women climbed to 3.7 by 1957, then fell to 1.8 by the mid-1970s.¹ During the past decade, the total fertility rate has fluctuated between 2.0 and 2.1—just below the level required for natural replacement of the population.

In June 2002, 61 million women aged 15 to 44 lived in the United States, according to the June Fertility Supplement to the Current Population Survey (CPS). During the preceding 12 months, 3.8 million of these

women gave birth—resulting in a fertility rate of 61 births per 1,000 women. First-time mothers accounted for 1.4 million of these births—producing a first-birth rate of 23 births per 1,000 women.

In 2002, about 10 percent of women ended their childbearing years with four or more children, compared with 36 percent of women in 1976. Correspondingly, the proportion of women ending their childbearing years with one or two children grew from 31 percent to 53 percent, as shown in Figure 1.

Birth Rates by Race and Hispanic Origin

Among the racial and ethnic groups studied (Non-Hispanic White, Black, Asian and Pacific Islander, and Hispanic), Hispanic women (of any race) were the only

Words That Count

Fertility rate, in this report, is defined as the number of women who reported having a child in a 12-month period ending in June per 1,000 women aged 15 to 44. Nearly all women end their childbearing by age 45.

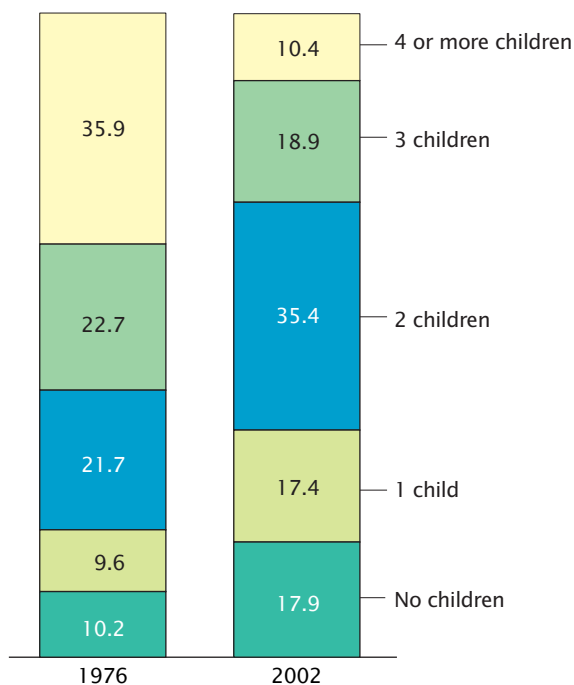
Total fertility rates are hypothetical estimates of lifetime childbearing based on age-specific birth rates for a calendar year.

Replacement level fertility is the number of births per woman (approximately 2.1) required to maintain the population in the long term, assuming no international migration.

Children ever born is the number of children a woman has ever had, excluding stillbirths.

¹ The estimates in this report (which may be shown in text, figures, and tables) are based on responses from a sample of the population and may differ from actual values because of sampling variability or other factors. As a result, apparent differences between the estimates for two or more groups may not be statistically significant. All comparative statements have undergone statistical testing and are significant at the 90-percent confidence level unless otherwise noted. For more information on the accuracy of the data, see Appendix A.

Figure 1.
Women Aged 40 to 44 by Number of Children Ever Born: 1976 and 2002
(Percent distribution)

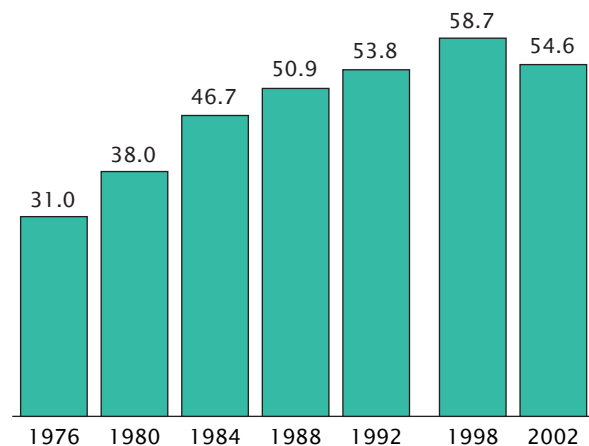


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, June 1976 and June 2002.

Figure 2.

Labor Force Participation Rates for Women Who Had a Child in the Last Year for Selected Years: June 1976 to June 2002

(In percent)



Note: Before 1990, the numbers are based on women aged 18 to 44. After 1990, the numbers are based on women aged 15 to 44.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, June 1976 to June 2002

ones reaching the end of their childbearing years with more births than the number required for natural replacement—2.4 births by age 40 to 44.² Non-Hispanic White women were below the replacement level, averaging 1.8 births by that age.

Foreign-born women aged 15 to 44 represented about 15 percent of all women of childbearing age living in the United States in 2002. During the year prior to the 2002 survey, 637,000 foreign-born women gave birth, resulting in a fertility rate of 71 births per 1,000 women. The fertility rate for native women was lower, at 60 births per 1,000 women.

² Because Hispanics may be any race, data for Hispanics overlap slightly with data for the Black population and Asian and Pacific Islander population. Based on the total population of women 15 to 44 years old surveyed in the June 2002 CPS, 4.7 percent of the Black population and 2.6 percent of the Asian and Pacific Islander population were also Hispanic. Data for the American Indian and Alaska Native population are not represented in this section because of the small sample size in the 2002 CPS.

Out-of-Wedlock Births

One-third of all births during the year occurred to unmarried mothers.³ Out-of-wedlock childbearing occurred predominantly among younger women. Eighty-nine percent of teenagers giving birth were unmarried, compared with 50 percent of mothers 20 to 24 years old and 12 percent of those 30 and older.

Out-of-wedlock childbearing declined with higher educational attainment. During the 12 months prior to the 2002 survey, 63 percent of births to women who had not graduated from high school were out of wedlock, compared with 6 percent of births to mothers with at least a bachelor's degree.

Employment for New Mothers

Almost 2 million new mothers (91 percent) were employed at the time of the survey and another 189,000 were unemployed and looking for work. Between 1976 and 1998, labor force participation among new mothers rose from 31 percent to 59 percent, as shown in Figure 2. The rate dropped to 55 percent in 2000 (the first statistically significant decline since 1976) and remained at 55 percent in 2002.

Changes in the labor force participation of women with infants could signal changes in the need for child care, in child-rearing practices, in future childbearing patterns, and in employer-sponsored maternity leave benefits, among other impacts.

³ Unmarried mothers in this report include women who were never married (77 percent) or were divorced or widowed (21 percent) at the time of the CPS.

The Census Bureau Can Tell You More

For more detailed information, consult the following U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Report: *Fertility of American Women: June 2002* (P20-548) by Barbara Downs.

Look for complete reports and detailed tables on the Census Bureau's Web site <www.census.gov>. Click on "F" and select "Fertility of American Women Data."

Contact the Census Bureau's Customer Service Center at 301-763-INFO (4636) or e-mail <pop@census.gov>.